

CHEER FOR THE FAINT-HEARTED NO. 440

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON SUNDAY EVENING, JANUARY 26, 1862,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“But his wife said unto him, If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have shown us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these.”

Judges 13:23.

FAITH is not only the door by which we enter into the way of salvation, as it is written, “He has opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles,” but it likewise describes the entire path of Christian pilgrimage, “that we also walk in the steps of that faith.” We are not only quickened by faith at the outset of our spiritual career, but we are supported and sustained thereby in all our subsequent experience—“the just shall *live* by faith.” As it is by faith that we come out from the world and begin to tread the heavenly road, so it must be by faith, that we walk all the journey through. Till we this veil of flesh lay down, till the angel of death shall rend the curtain and we shall see him face to face, let us not hope to walk by sight or sense, but only by faith in the living God.

A life of faith is always very singular, often it seems very foolish to the carnal man. The man who acts by faith often acts imprudently in the eyes of the world, he appears unbusiness-like, because he observes not the maxims of his times, but holds fast by those statutes which God has given us for all time. Faith and patience often encourage a man to go the very way that caution and prudence would tell him not to go. And not infrequently those who are weak in the faith will hold up their hands with astonishment, even if they do not speak with some degree of indignation, at the daring way in which the man strong in faith challenges the promise of God, and acts as if he believed them to be quite as true as though they were already fulfilled. You know little, my brothers and sisters, of what it is to walk by faith, if you do not find it to be a way that you know not, and a path which you have not seen. We saw the last step not until we had taken it, but the foundation on which faith is to put its foot for the next we cannot see. We do, as it were, tread on clouds and find them firm, we put our feet on mists and find them adamant beneath our feet. Happy is that man who, steadfast, upright, cheerful, goes from strength to strength, believing his God! Trusting in his God, he knows no care, resting in his God he knows no impossibility.

But, it seems from our text, that we have one or two lessons to learn. And the first is, that the strongest faith has its seasons of wavering. Even Abraham, “the father of the faithful,” had his seasons of distrust, when expediency rather than integrity prompted him. Most of those eminent saints, who are mentioned in Scripture as exhibiting faith in its greatness, appear to have sometimes showed the white flag of unbelief. There may have lived—I will not dare to say to the contrary—there may have lived some man who did never once doubt his God, but I think I have never had the privilege of putting my eyes upon him. There may be, and I hope there are, some Christians who through their whole career never doubted their interest in Christ, and who never had to say—

*“Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought,
Do I love the Lord or no,
Am I His, or am I not?”*

But, I must say, I think such brethren are few. I think you might travel far before you should meet with any. God forbid I should speak lightly of unbelief! It is the most damnable of sins. God forbid I should say a word in its favor, or encourage its propagation. There cannot be a greater villainy out of hell than doubting the promise of God. There cannot be a greater act of treason than to mistrust the love, the faith, the tenderness, the truth of the God who has helped us hitherto, but still the confession must be made, humiliating though it be—we do know that even those believers whose hearts are true, and whose souls are clad in the panoply of heaven, do yet sometimes find their loins loose, and their strength fail them.

Mr. Pilgrim thought Mr. Great-heart never had a doubt. And so is it with some of our hearers. They fancy that their pastors certainly never have any trials as to their union with Christ, they can always read their titles clear. Ah, beloved, but if you should ask those men, they might say with Elijah, “I am not better than my fathers.” There are times when the high-soaring eagle droops to the earth, and when he who could scale the stars has to lay flat upon his face in dust and ashes, crying, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

These reflections are illustrated by the narrative of our text. Manoah certainly was strong in faith. He did not even see the angel, but he believed—“Blessed is he that has not seen, and yet has believed”—and when he entreated that he might see the angel, there seemed to be more curiosity than wavering in his faith. He believed God, and no doubt, settled in his own mind that he would be obedient to the heavenly vision. Yet, even he begins to entertain misgivings when he says, “We shall surely die, for we have seen an angel of the LORD.” Good Lord! of what small account are the best of men apart from You! How high they go when You lift them up! How low they fall if You withdraw Your hand! ’Tis our joy amidst distress when You enable us to say, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him,” but if you take away your Spirit, we cannot even trust you in the brightest day. When storms gather around us, we can laugh at them if You be with us, but in the fairest morn that ever glowed on human heart, we doubt and we miscarry if You are not with us still, to preserve and strengthen the faith which You have Yourself bestowed.

Dwelling no longer, however, upon that very humiliating truth, we come to make a second observation. We have observed that some of these greatest aberrations of faith have occurred just after the brightest seasons of enjoyment. Some of us have learned to be afraid of joy. Sadness is often the herald of satisfaction, but bliss is oftentimes the harbinger of pain. Whether it is that God provides for our struggle by giving us an extraordinary banquet before a season of long fasting, so that like Elijah, we may go forty days in the strength of this marvelous meat, or whether it is that He cures us of the dangers of surfeit by sending us on long journeys after we have had high feastings, I cannot say, but so it is.

How strangely is it related of our Lord! He went into the Jordan of His baptism, the Spirit descended upon Him like a dove, the Father’s voice saluted Him, “You are my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased.” What next? “And immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness, and He was there in the wilderness forty days tempted of Satan, and was with the wild beasts.”

John Bunyan, with great wisdom, puts the palace Beautiful first, and then no sooner does Christian get out of the Palace gates, than he begins to descend into the Valley of Humiliation. They had given him a sword, and a shield, and a helmet. He had never had those before. Now that he had his sword, he found that he had to use it against Apollyon; now that he had his shield, he had to hold it up to catch the fiery dart; now that he had received the weapon of “All prayer,” he found that he had need of it as he walked through that desperate place, the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

God does not give His people weapons to play with, He does not give them strength to spend on their lusts. Lord, if You have given me these goodly weapons, it is sure I shall need them in hard fighting. If I have had a feast at Your table, I will remember that it is but a short walk from the upper chamber to the garden of Gethsemane.

Daniel, the man greatly beloved, was reduced very low. “All his comeliness was turned into corruption and he retained no strength,” when God showed him “the great vision.” Thus, too, with

favored John, he must be banished to Patmos, in the deep solitude of that Aegean sea-girt island he must receive "The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto him."

I have noticed, in the ordinary scenes of Christian experience that our greatest joys come just after some of our sorest trials. When the howling tempest has played out its strength, it soothes itself to sleep. Then comes a season of calm and quiet so profound in its stillness, that only the monstrous tempest could have been the mother of so mighty a calm. So seems it with us. Deep waves of trial, high mountains of joy, but the reverse is almost as often true, from Pisgah's top we go to our graves, from the top of Carmel we have to go down to the dens of lions, and fight with the leopards. Let us be on our watchtower, lest like Manoah, having seen the angel of God, the next thing should be that we say, "We shall surely die, for we have seen the LORD."

It seems very plain from our text that it is a very happy thing if, when one believer's down, there is another near to lift him up. In this case Manoah found in his wife a help meet. It is said by old Master Henry Smith that there is many a man who has had his head broken with his own rib, but there is many a man who has had his heart cured in the same way. So, in this case, if wife and husband had both been down at one time, they might have been long in getting up. But seeing that when he fell she was there strong in faith, to give him a helping hand, it was but a slight fall, and they went on their way rejoicing.

If one shall fall, then his brother shall help him up. What is the lesson here? Why, perhaps some of you have got such strong faith tonight that you hardly know what to do with it. What should you do? If there was some person fainting in the seat behind you, and you had some strong smelling salts, you would pass them over. Now sometimes our faith is intended to be as a bottle to be put to the nostril of other fainting souls. If you are strong, help your weak brother. If you see any bowed down, take them on your shoulders, help to carry them. Does not your Master carry the lambs in His bosom? Imitate Him, and sometimes carry a lamb in your bosom too.

It is a divine thing to wipe tears from all eyes, perhaps your faith is meant to be a handkerchief with which you may wipe away the tears of your brother. But you say, "Where are the ones low in faith just now?" Wife, perhaps it is your husband! Husband, perhaps it is your wife! It may be, daughter, your aged mother. Brother, maybe 'tis your brother, perhaps the very person who sits next to you in the pew, who may at this time be saying, "I walk in darkness and I see no light." Speak you, speak you wisely, fervently, affectionately, out of the fullness of your soul, and who can tell—He who said twice, "Comfort you, comfort you, my people; speak you comfortably unto Jerusalem," may make you to be a Barnabas, a son of Consolation to those who are weary and ready to die.

Is it not the duty of Christians to strengthen the weak hands and to confirm the feeble knees? Do not follow the way of the world. It is always, if a man is going down, "Down with him, the moment he begins to reel, give him a push, send him over at once." And it is so with some coarse-minded professors. If they see a brother a little faint, they tell him something frightful—something about the dragons and the lions, or the giants that are in the road. Instead of that, my brother, help to prop up your reeling friend for a little season, and it may be that in some brighter day with him, when your dark hour shall come, he will repay with a mighty interest the little cheer which you give him today.

It is a good thing, however, to temper kindness with wisdom. You know Manoah's wife did not say, when she found that she knew more than her husband did, "Why how silly you must be! What a stupid man to be frightened like this!" She did not begin, as I know some Christians would do who are stronger in faith than the weak ones, by scolding about the matter, but no, she used soft liniment for smarting wounds. She knew that it does not do to put stinging nettles to a cut, and therefore she put soft salve where there had been a very deep wound. Let us do the same.

It is time to talk of duty to a brother when you get him out of the ditch, but when you see a man down, I would hardly talk to him about the sin of tumbling in, but pull him out first and brush him clean, and then afterwards tell him to take heed that he fall not there again. I have sometimes had lessons given me about unbelief, when they were not, I think, very profitable. There should be a timeliness about our

advice, and if we see a man in Manoah's plight, afraid of dying, we should use the discretion of Manoah's wife, and encourage and cheer his heart.

The text seems to me to suggest certain consolations which ought to be laid hold of by believers in Christ in their time of sore trouble. Let me speak to any Christian present tonight who has a trouble—we will suppose it temporal trouble.

“These are hard times!” Times have always been hard ever since I recollect them, and I suppose they ever will be, for they used to be hard in our grandfathers' days, and there seems to be no likelihood but what they will continue to be so. Yet we always talk of “The good old times,” and when our children succeed us, they will speak about our times as being “The good old times” too. The fact is, the present time is the best time that ever was, and “now” is the only time that belongs to us, for the past is gone and the future is not come. The present is what we have got in hand, let us make the right use of it.

But you have had losses, and crosses, and disappointments. You are chastened every morning, and you are troubled all day long, and Satan whispered to you last Saturday night, when you were putting up the shutters as tired as you could be, “It is no use going to the house of God tomorrow. There is nothing there for you. God has been troubling you all week, He means to destroy you, He is going to give you up, you may do what you will, but the current is too strong, you may tug and pull, but you will starve for all that. God has forsaken you, and your enemies are persecuting you on every side.” Well, now, it would be a very curious thing if it were true, but it is not true, for the reasons which Manoah's wife gave.

Remember, first, the Lord has in your case, accepted a burnt offering and a meat offering at your hand. You know that when your faith laid hold of Christ, God did not spurn the sacrifice you brought. When you said, for the first time in your life—

*“My faith doth lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine,
While like a penitent I stand,
And here confess my sin,”*

he did not reject the offering which you then presented to Him, but He spoke with loving voice and said, “Go and sin no more. Your sins, which are many, are all forgiven you.” Since that time you have brought the meat offering of your prayers, and they have been heard, you have had answers of peace. In looking back upon the past, you can remember many times and seasons when God has especially answered you as though He would rend the heavens and put out His right hand full of the mercies which you needed.

Now, would the Lord have heard you? Above all, would He have accepted Christ for you? Would He have accepted your faith and saved you in Christ, if He had meant to destroy you? What! can you trust Him with your soul, and not trust Him with your shop? Can you leave eternity with Him, and not leave time? What! trust the immortal spirit, and not this poor decaying, moldering, flesh and blood? Man! shame on you. If the Lord had meant you to die, He would not have accepted the offering at your hand. But, you say, He will forsake you in this trouble. Remember what things He has shown to you. See how Manoah's wife said, “Would He have shown us such things as these?”

Why, what has your past life been? Has not it been a wonder? You have been in as bad a plight as you are in tonight scores of times, and you have got out of it. “There is a big wave coming over my head,” ay, but there have been fifty waves as big as that which have passed over your head without drowning you, and this will not. “It is a deep river I have to ford.” Ah, but you have waded through as deep streams as that, and you have not been drowned. Besides, remember how He showed you His love in a strange city, and His faithfulness, perhaps, in a far-off land. When there was none to comfort you, and none to help you, His own right hand defended you, and His right hand brought salvation to you. I can say joyfully and cheerfully—

*“When trouble like a gloomy cloud,
Has gathered thick and thundered loud,
He near my side has always stood,
His loving-kindness, O how good!”*

And I often think myself the biggest fool in the world for ever daring to doubt my God again after such singular interpositions both of providence and grace as you and I have seen in this church and in the midst of this congregation. If He had meant to destroy us, would He have shown us such things as we have seen? After such kindness in the past, will He let us sink at last? God forbid!

Besides this, Manaoh's wife gave a third reason, “Nor would he at this time have told us such things as these.” She meant that He would not have given them such prophecies of the future as He had done, if He meant to kill them. It stood to reason, she seemed to say, “If I am to bear a son, we are not going to die.” And so, remember, God has made one or two promises which are true, and if they be true, it stands to reason He won't leave you.

Let us have one of them. “No good thing will I withhold from them who walk uprightly.” Then, as you are to have every good thing, you must have it, it is absolutely certain that God is not going to leave you without good things now. Or take another, “When you go through the rivers I will be with you, and through the floods they shall not overflow you.” Mark that! It is certain that God will not permit the floods to overflow you. Then it stands to reason that you cannot be drowned.

It is a good thing for a Christian who is much tried in business, to carry his check book in his pocket, but mark what kind of check book I mean. Get a copy of “Clarke's Precious Promises.” They are the promises collated from Scripture put under the different heads. I generally have kept a copy in my pocket, so that when I have had a trouble of a particular sort, I could turn to the head under which my trouble would come, and I never turned there without finding a promise to meet it.

Or whenever your trial comes, go home to your Bible, open it, ask the Lord to direct you, and with a little search I think you will soon find a promise that was made on purpose for you. It may have suited twenty cases before, but you can only say if an angel had come down from heaven to bring a message precisely adapted to your peculiar trial, it could not have been better worded, the arrow could not have hit the center of the mark more surely than it has. Well, then, if the Lord has meant to destroy you, would He have given you that promise? Would He thus have deluded you? Oh, this is far from Him! Let the fact that He has accepted Christ for you, that He has already shown you so much favor, and that He has given you such precious promises, let these, I say, lead you to think that He will not destroy you, He will not leave you.

But we will suppose for a moment, in the next place, that you are in some spiritual trouble. “Oh,” you say, “this is worse than temporal trial,” and indeed it is. Touch a man in his house, and he can bear it; touch him in his children, and he may bear that, but touch him in his bone and in his flesh, nay, go farther, touch him in his soul, and in his faith, and then it is hard to lay hold on God, and trust Him still. The enemy had thrust sore at Manoah to vex him, and make him fret. There may be some here whose spiritual enemy has set upon them dreadfully of late, and he has been howling in your ears, “It's all over with you, you are cast off, God has rejected you, you are twice dead, plucked up by the roots, you are wandering stars, you are clouds without rain, you are one of those that knew the way of righteousness, but have turned away from it, you have gone back to your old sin, God has cursed you, like Esau He has rejected you, you have sold your portion for a mess of pottage, and you are cast out forever.” Nay, soul, thus says the Lord to you, “Was there not a time when Christ was precious to you?” O backslider, was there not a season when you could put your finger into the prints of the nails, and your hand into His side? Poor fallen soul, was there not a period when that precious hymn of Toplady's was sweet to your ears?—

*“Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;*

*Naked, look to Thee for dress,
Helpless, come to Thee for grace;
Black I to the fountain fly,
Wash me, Savior, or I die.”*

Then I tell you, soul, if the Lord had ever meant to destroy you, He would never have permitted you to know a precious Christ, or to put your trust in Him. Besides, fallen though you now are, through sore travail, yet was there not a time when you saw the beauty of God in His temple? I went to the house of God with the company that kept holy day, His name to me was as ointment poured forth. My soul delighted herself in her God, and my spirit made her boast in her King. O Jesus, once You were very sweet to me. I knew the plague of my own heart even then, but I knew Your power to save, I knew the fellowship of the Father, and of His Son Jesus Christ—

*“What peaceful hours I then enjoyed,
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void,
The world can never fill.”*

Our soul! what a mercy it is that the world cannot fill it, and what a greater mercy still that God will fill it, for He never emptied a soul He did not mean to fill, He never stripped a man He did not mean to clothe, He never made one a spiritual beggar without intending to make Him spiritually rich, and if you, tonight, are brought to the first stage of desperation, you are brought to the first stage of hope. Now that man comes to his wit's end, God shall begin to magnify His mercy and His truth.

To conclude the argument of Manoah's wife, what promises God has made even to you! What has He said of His people? “I will surely bring them in.” “I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.” And what does Christ say again?—“Father, I will that they also whom you have given me, be with me where I am.”

But turn to that Book for yourself. See the promises made to the soul that ever did believe in Christ, and you may say once for all, “If He had meant to destroy me He would not have made such promises as these, if He meant to desert me in spiritual trouble He would never have brought me this far.” To the Christian who is near his death, I commend this text, to the grey-headed tottering saint, to the consumptive girl, whose cheeks betray the worm within, to you who are going down the steep decline, and whose feet begin to chill with the waters of the black river. He has accepted Christ at your hands, be not afraid to die. He has showed you the riches of His faithfulness hitherto trust Him for the rest. He is engaged by covenant, yea, by the blood of the everlasting covenant, to bring you to heaven, do not doubt, but boldly ford the stream, for in its deepest parts you shall feel the bottom. Thus boldly live and boldly dare to die, for when you go through the valley of the shadow of death, He will be with you, His rod and His staff shall comfort you.

Now, it may happen tonight that I have some young Christians here, who have only during the last week or two been converted to God, and they have been falling during the last two or three days into the Slough of Despond. I hope this sermon may help them out, for of you is it true that if you have laid hold of Christ He would not have enabled you to do that, if He meant to leave you; if you have been shown the evil of your own heart, He would not have shown you that if He meant to destroy you; and if He has caused you to lean upon any promise, depend upon it He will give you that promise, and fulfill it in your experience. He will save you. I think about five days after I first found Christ, when my joy had been such that I could have danced for very mirth at the thought that Christ was mine, on a sudden I fell into a sad fit of despondency. I will tell you why. When I first believed in Christ, I am not sure that I thought the devil was dead, but certainly I had a kind of notion that he was so mortally wounded he could not disturb me. And then I certainly fancied that the corruption of my nature had received its death blow. I read what Cowper said—

*“Since the dear hour that brought me to Thy foot,
And cut up all my follies by the root.”*

And I really thought that Cowper knew what he was saying, whereas, never did any poet blunder so terribly as Cowper did when he said that, for no man, I think, has got his follies cut up by the roots yet. However, I fondly dreamed mine were, I felt persuaded that they would never sprout again. I was going to be perfect—I fully calculated upon it—and lo, I found an intruder I had not reckoned upon, an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. So I went to that same Primitive Methodist Chapel where I first received peace with God, through the simple preaching of the Word. The text happened to be, “Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” “There,” I thought “that’s a text for me.” I had got as far as that—in the middle of that very sentiment—when the minister began by saying, “Paul was not a believer when he said this.” Well now I knew I was a believer, and it seemed to me from the context that Paul must have been a believer too. Now I am sure he was. The man went on to say that no child of God even did feel any conflict within. So I took up my hat and left the place, and I do not think I have frequented such places since. They are very good for people who are unconverted to go to, but of very little use for children of God.

That is my notion of Methodism. It is a noble thing to bring in strangers, but a terrible thing for those who are brought in to sit and feed there. It is like the parish pound, it is a good thing to put sheep in when they are strayed, but there is no food inside, they had better be let out as soon as possible to find real food for the soul. I knew that that man understood nothing of experiential divinity, or of practical heart theology, or else he would not have talked so. A good man he was I do not doubt, but utterly incompetent to the task of dealing with a case like that.

Then we say to you tonight, who are in such a case, we are not at all surprised, this is just where God’s people generally come soon after conversion. If they get over that Slough of Despond, they may go on merrily for a long way—years perhaps—certainly for whole miles, as Mr. Bunyan says that, when Christian got out of that Slough, he went for a long distance along a high road within walls—called the Walls of Salvation—and so it is. Once get over that, that first season of spiritual depression, which is partly caused by the excessive exhilaration of our mental frame after conversion, and we shall go on readily enough, rejoicing in God. Be not troubled, young Christian, about this matter, go you again to Christ, put your trust in Him anew, go once more as a poor lost sinner, and take Jesus to be your all in all, cast yourself flat on your face again before His cross, go you and wash anew in the fountain filled with blood, let your espousals come over again, and then the joy of your espousals shall come again too, and so, God keep you, and God bless you, that the Evil One touch you not. “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; he that believes not shall be damned.” Believe, then, on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your house. May God give His blessing for the Savior’s sake! Amen.

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